

Blazing a trail for women in production



By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Meet Faith Lelaka, unit head of VWSA's paint shop, and the first black woman to be appointed at this level in the production environment. She has worked her way from a technician in the process lab to the production line and into leadership. Outside of work, she's a wife and proud mother of four.



 Faith Lelaka, VWSA.

Inspired by her achievement, we got in touch with Lelaka for #WomesMonth, to find out more about her role, the challenges she encounters and her inspirations.

Briefly describe your role at VWSA.

I am the division head of paint shop production. I oversee all aspects of the painting process, from production right through to the support departments (process and maintenance). Paint shop is responsible for production volume achievement and quality for both our internal and external customers within the specified guaranteed warranties.

I'm also responsible for execution of the company's KPIs and key strategies with my team. I actively participate in the daily Main Plant Production Forum to discuss plant performance, quality achievement and struggles, and projects per shop.

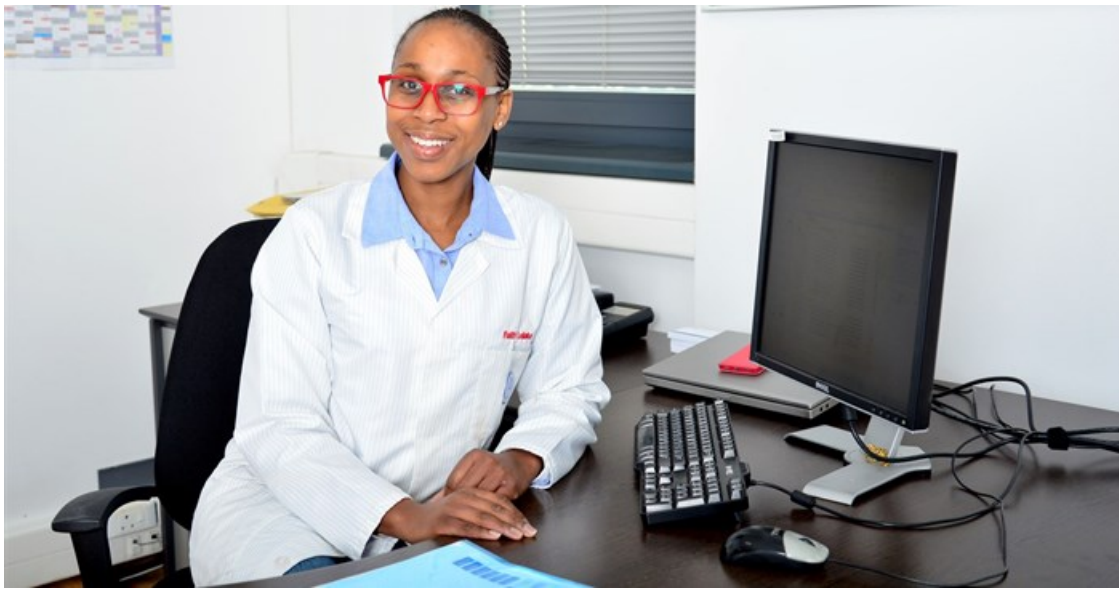
Tell us about your journey into your current position.

I started at VWSA in 1999 as an in-service trainee in the paint shop process laboratory, after which I worked as a process engineer, still within the paint shop. Afterwards I joined the quality assurance analysis department as a body and trim engineer for the final assembly. After the new paint shop construction was complete, I was recalled back into the paint shop under the quality department as a quality supervisor.

At this stage I took over the responsibility of the new model introduction (VW250 Polo). In the beginning of 2010, I joined the paint shop production team as a production manager, responsible for the corrosion leg in the old paint shop after it re-opened. I was then back in the new paint shop heading the process department for almost three years before I was promoted into my current position.

What is the biggest challenge facing women in your industry?

The automotive industry is a male-dominated and complex industry, especially the production division. The other challenge is that we are sometimes not taken seriously, especially in forums where engineering projects and strategies are discussed.



■ ***Do you think it's important to have a month dedicated to women?***

Personally, I think it is vital. There are many challenges that face us daily as women. There's a lot of juggling and we sometimes fall into a trap of despondency due to pressure. Women's Month is an opportunity to re-energise, re-focus and share our struggles and strengths, and a mechanism to keep us standing firm as women.

■ ***Who is your biggest influence?***

My mother, Khosi Nomala; she challenges me in all spheres of life and is never satisfied with the status quo. She is innovative, inquisitive, supportive and most of all a God-fearing woman. My dad also played a key role in my life and I live by the teachings and principles he has instilled in me.

■ ***Based on your experience, what advice would you give women hoping to pursue a career in your field?***

Perseverance in whatever you place your heart and mind to. Let passion be the driver of your dreams and exclude any preconceptions. Be a team player, surround yourself with people who have a positive progression within your industry, and always ask to understand and learn. Most importantly, take charge of your development plan.

ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

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